

# DCMA Employee, Wife Overcome Obstacle to Pursue Passion

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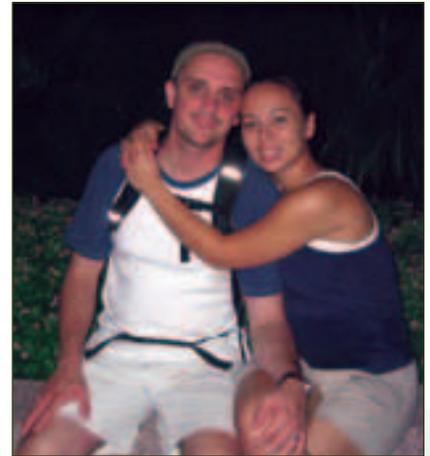
An old saying states that when one has a passion for something, he or she will overcome any and all obstacles that come between the person and his or her passion. This certainly rings true in the case of one Defense Contract Management Agency employee and his wife.

Air Force Maj. Alan Willingham, DCMA Israel administrative contracting officer and business team leader, and his wife, Sharilyn, have continually found ways to overcome every obstacle they have encountered to pursue their love of choreographing drum and bugle corps and marching band routines. With Alan currently assigned to the DCMA Israel office, he and his wife are halfway around the world from

the groups they instruct back in the United States. But this is a minor obstacle in the road to pursuing their passion.

To overcome this challenge, Alan and Sharilyn have utilized the benefits of the Internet. After putting hours into designing a routine, they record themselves performing the routine and upload a video of the performance to a Web site. The group leaders in the U.S. then are able to download the video and incorporate the instruction into their routine.

Although being geographically separated is a complication that can be overcome, Alan admits it does require more time to reach the desired outcome. "The hardest part is just not being there," he said. "We



Air Force Maj. Alan Willingham, DCMA Israel administrative contracting officer and business team leader, and his wife, Sharilyn, pose for a picture together during a recent outing.

have to wait to see a videotape of the group's performance based on what we provided them and then schedule a time to do a Web conference with the director to discuss any changes."

Members of just one of the many drum and bugle corps bands Air Force Maj. Alan Willingham and his wife, Sharilyn, choreograph for compete at a competition in the U.S. recently.

Under these circumstances, changes that normally could be made on the fly and take only hours to incorporate into the overall routine take days. Sharilyn finds that “mood and characterization are difficult to convey through video and sometimes get lost in translation.”

Even with these factors, Alan and Sharilyn have been able to assist bands and drum and bugle corps groups win multiple competitions. Sharilyn, however, points out that success for them is not measured in trophies. “In our line of work, one must define success in other, more personal ways,” she said. “We measure success by the learning experience of our students. ... We teach that the measure of one’s worth, or the worth of the endeavor, is not measured in trophies and accolades but in the wisdom and experience that one gains from such.”

Through their 11 years of working together, the couple is able to design and choreograph routines faster. However, the time spent on an individual routine varies based on the level of involvement the client wants and his or her overall skill level. “If they want the whole thing — music, drill and guard — it can take weeks,”

### Did you know?

#### What is the difference between marching bands and drum and bugle corps?

Drum and bugle corps are similar to marching bands because both groups have horns and drums and musicians that march. However, traditional drum and bugle corps consist of bell-front brass horns, field drums, a color guard and an honor guard. Marching bands, on the other hand, typically include brass, woodwinds and percussion instruments and exclude an honor guard.

#### Drum and Bugle Corps History

The history behind drum and bugle corps stems from military bugle and drum units returning from World War I and succeeding wars. Traditionally, drum and bugle corps served as signaling units as early as before the American Civil War. With the advent of the radio, however, bugle signaling units became obsolete. Surplus equipment was sold to veteran organizations. These organizations then formed drum and bugle corps groups that performed in community events and local celebrations. With time, rivalries between corps emerged and the competitive drum and bugle corps circuit evolved.

Alan said. “When I design a guard show, I average about two to three hours per minute of a show.”

Drum and bugle corps represent the highest level of competition. According to Alan, at this level each little detail matters. As a result, attempting to reach perfection means more time spent in the overall process.

For both Alan and Sharilyn, their shared passion has influenced their personal relationship in a deep way. “I could never be happy with someone who didn’t understand this activity and my love for it,” Sharilyn said. “Through this activity, Alan and I have learned how to become two halves of one whole that balance and complement each other.” Or, as Alan stated aptly, “This activity is the string that binds our souls together.”

